Listing of Claims:

1 - 27 (Canceled)

28 (Currently Amended) A method for dispensing and evidencing postage indicia by a postage generating device (PGD) in a system having a plurality of PGDs that have been divided into n groups identified by a group designation G_i, $i = 1,…n$, the method performed by the indicia generating devices comprising:

    (a) receiving a master secret key K and a secret key K_i from a distribution center over a network after manufacture of the PGD, and storing the master secret key K and the secret key K_i in the PGD;

    (b) in response to receiving a request to generate an indicium for a mail piece destined for a particular postal destination $Dest$, generating the indicium;

    (c) computing a verification key V_i^{Dest} as a function of the secret key K_i and the postal destination;

    (d) computing a key ID I_i^{Dest} as a function of the master secret key K and the postal destination;

    (e) using the computed verification key V_i^{Dest} to create a digital signature for the indicia; and

    (f) digitally signing the indicia by including the digital signature and the computed key ID I_i^{Dest} on the indicia.

29 (Original) The method of claim 28 further including the step of computing each verification key V_i^{Dest} as a one-way function H of the PGD group key K_i and a designation of the postal destination:

$$V_i^{Dest} = H(K_i, Dest).$$

30   (Original) The method of claim 29 further including the step of using ZIP codes to

        designate the postal destination.

31   (Original) The method of claim 30 further including the step of computing each of

        the key ID's as a one-way function H of the PGD group, G_i, the master secret

        key, K, and a designation of the postal destination, $Dest$: